

## **HAMPSHIRE 41 CORNWALL 19**

### **Match report by Richard V Isaacs**

It was convincing, if not spectacular, but Gill Burns County Championship Division 2 back-to-back holders kicked off their 2025 campaign with a solid 41-19 victory over hard-working Cornwall at Havant on Sunday afternoon.

On a glorious sunny afternoon, in front of a healthy attendance, Hampshire produced a good display of running rugby and scored seven tries but there will be plenty of work to do before their two away games in the next fortnight.

Things couldn't have started any worse for the home side as Portsmouth's powerful flanker Kim Lewis saw her senior debut last just eighty seconds before suffering a nasty head injury, leaving her bloodied and unable to continue.

The visitors, who have Hampshire a stern examination last year at Truro in the Championship before going down 10-24 on that occasion, were not intimidated and pushed the home side deep into their 22.

However, when the move broke down, a good clearance kick took the game to half way and, following good handling move, progressed to the Cornish five metre line where they were penalised and Trojans' scrum-half Hannah Kemish quickly took the tap and crossed for the opening score.

Hampshire doubled their lead on 10 minutes when a fine attack down the right, instigated by Havant pairing of Abi Pearson and Sam King forced Cornwall on the back foot but the play broke down on the line.

But, from the scrum, the visitors knocked on in goal and, from the five-metre scrum restart, the ball was spun out to Rose Brown in the centre who crashed her way over, converting her own score.

The one issue that Hampshire were enduring was conceding too many penalties and the Oxfordshire-based referee brandished the first of three yellow cards to the hosts when Ciera Forry was sent for a ten-minute breather.

That allowed Cornwall to exploit the gap and, following a handful of close range penalties, Launceston prop Libbie Cole powered her way under the posts to give the Duchy visitors some hope, especially when Georgia Hall (Penryn) converted.

Time and again, Hampshire were dealing with the wrath of the referee, giving Cornwall impetus to pile forward, forcing the hosts into spells deep in their own half and, as half-time beckoned they resisted once again, standing tall in the waves of Cornish attacks.

Forry, back on the field, was on the scoresheet on 35 minutes when another close range penalty allowed Havant's Natasha Bullock to drive forward and it was her Hooks Lane

teammate who emerged from a pile of bodies for Hampshire's third and a 17-7 half-time lead.

Some strong half-time words from the coaches, including Wales' Six Nations star and long-time Hampshire player Donna Rose, seemed to work as Havant winger Rhiannon Powell followed up excellent work from Brown and some fine handling across the line found the debutant to score the bonus point score.

However, once again, Hampshire indiscipline cost them dearly as two players – Sam King and Tessa Gale – were both forced to sit out ten minutes just five minutes apart, leaving Hampshire with just 13 on the park for a period.

The visitors made them pay as Tia Larson (Bude) was sent over wide out, in plenty of space, and another attack was held up over the line as they came strongly once more.

Once number parity was restored, Hampshire added three more tries in the final 15 minutes, firstly for King after very good work from Powell and Emily Freeman to spread the play from left wing to right, allowing King to touch down.

And then Keeta Rowlands, on as a replacement, posted a brace of scores, either side of a Cornwall try for full-back Amy Bunt, both of Rowlands' scores coming from penalty line-out catch and drives, the latter after Kesha Drain was held over the line but the ball handily came out for the Trojans' player to seal the comfortable win.

Hampshire travel to Devon and Okehampton RFC next Sunday – the two sides securing victories in the opening fixtures going head to head – so victory in the west at the weekend will go a long way on the road to Matt Davis' side securing a 'three-peat'.